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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1344
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RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 1393
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 6241
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 5808
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 1159
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0099
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 2722

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SUBJECT: LIBYAN, ALGERIAN MINISTERS OF INTERIOR DISCUSS
BORDER AND SECURITY ISSUES IN ALGIERS

¶1. (SBU) General Salah Rajab El-Mismari, Libyan Secretary General of the Popular Committee and de facto Libyan Minister of the Interior, visited Algiers July 17-19, holding talks on border and security issues with Algerian Minister of the Interior Nouredine Yazid Zerhouni. The official visit, according to the press and Embassy contacts, signaled that Libya -- and its leader Muamar El-Qaddafi in particular -- had pulled back from Qaddafi's initiative for a "Greater Sahara" tribal alliance and was looking to patch up relations with the GOA. Terrorists and smugglers operating in the buffer zones between the undelineated borders of Algeria and Libya have been a rising cause of concern not just for Algeria but for all the greater Sahel countries. Delineating the border, thought to be long overdue on the Algerian side, was the primary focal point of the discussions, according to press reporting and MFA sources.

¶2. (U) General El-Mismari, acknowledging Algerian security concerns about the lack of controls along the Libyan border, told journalists that planned "collaboration" in delineating the border -- the biggest breakthrough achieved during the visit -- would be "extremely beneficial" for citizens of both countries, especially those living near the border. The Libyan official considered this joint decision, which he described as a partial settlement of the issue, as a sign of "real improvement" in bilateral relations. The meetings in Algiers also led to the signing of an agreement on across-the-board security cooperation; cleared the way for the reactivation of the bilateral Joint Commission on Security; and set the stage for better Libyan-Algerian cooperation on "organized crime, terrorism, illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and migration flows." Algerian officials privately welcomed El-Mismari's visit as an indication that Qaddafi was becoming a "more pragmatic" leader, according to one MFA source. Zerhouni, for his part, was quoted by one reporter in an off-the-record session as welcoming his Libyan counterpart's visit as "an important and positive step" in improving bilateral relations.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: MFA sources quietly credit the United States for making El-Mismari's visit, and the progress associated with it, possible. Without going into detail, one MFA official commented that U.S. engagement of Libya on the Algerian border issues was key to scheduling the visit and making it successful. Post, for its part, is unaware of what role the U.S. may have played with the Libyans on this issue.

